

Role of library professionals in today's digital world

Meenu Kumari

Librarian, Tika Ram College of Education, Sonipat, Haryana, India

Abstract

New paradigms have evolved in the field of library and information science in last two decades due to ICT impact and digitalization of library resources and totally change the earlier meaning of library from document preservation to knowledge management. The library professionals are facing new challenges because of unprecedented explosion of information and its availability in different forms which are created by globalization, privatization and liberalization of every aspect of human life in one way and emergence of ICT and its application in generation, communication and access of information in another way. To cope with these problems, the modern librarianship needs to be change in their philosophy and practices from custodian of document to information provider. There has been a paradigm shift in the way libraries used to manage as traditional store house to access providers. Therefore, the present digital environment has brought a lot of changes not only on the library and information services but also on the roles and expectations of the library professionals to satisfy their user's information demand.

Keywords: library, professionals, knowledge, management, philosophy

Introduction

A librarian is a person who works professionally in a library, providing access to information and sometimes social or technical programming. In addition, librarians provide instruction on information literacy. They are usually required to hold a graduate degree from a library school such as a Master's degree in Library Science or Library and Information Studies.

Education and library have been inseparables since centuries and civilizations. Evidences are plenty where library has been one integral part of all education, more so in the institutions of higher learning. In India, Nalanda and Takshashila Universities and even the gurukula type of education has highly dependent on their libraries. The Higher Education in India, during the last sixty years or so has been expanding primarily for social and political reasons rather than on economic and manpower considerations. On 28th December 1953 the University Grants Commission (UGC) was established in India. U.G.C brought out reforms in college education by relaxing several colleges from the rigid regimentation of traditional course structure. As a result of the schemes initiated for restructuring courses in its Sixth Plan Development proposals, there has been a great expansion of libraries in most colleges on the development of library collection during the last twenty years. The UGC provided generous funds for purchase of reference books and textbooks as well as grants for library buildings. The UGC also sponsored the College Humanities and Social Science Programme (COHSSIP)

Changed role of LIS professionals

The role of the academic librarian in the information age is to promote access to appropriate and accurate information to serve the needs of users. This has been the librarian's mission

for generations. However, the information age has made this mission much more challenging and complex. It has also demanded that librarians and library support staff bring or develop new technical skills to promote information access. The technology revolution has brought many changes to the way librarians and library staff manage their day and provide information to users. Up until ten years ago, libraries were book focused institutions. There were just print card catalogs; online vendor databases had barely become tools in the librarian's arsenal to answer questions; the Internet as we know it now was still years away from practical use. Library acquisitions, cataloging and circulation were done via paper or managed by using print ledgers, pens and card pockets. Spreadsheets, internal databases or other productivity software was never used to manage library data.

The wealth of conventional wisdom related to traditional information management has been subjected to drastic changes. Today's information technology has transformed the generation of knowledge and its management to explore various utilities for the benefit of mankind. The global communication technologies created several avenues too many. The instance communication around the globe has revolutionized the world society in many ways. The instance accessibility of information significantly changed the scenario to greater heights. The library in an educational institution is now considered as actively participating medium between the learners and the vast store of knowledge resources, between classroom lecture and the vast sources of information where the content of the lectures are drawn. The librarian has an extended role from keeper of knowledge resources to become a true friend and a perfect guide for the learners in an academic setting. The gist of the above deliberation is to highlight that libraries continue to adopt new media from time to time- from manuscript to electronic media. Similarly the

media has also influenced the learners and the learners of different dimensions. The new education technology becoming part of every education has also become the part and parcel of distance education. So the institutions like libraries have influencing factors to both formal and non-formal type of education by adopting the changes. At the contemporary changing scenario of information storage media transformation from paper to electronic base, university and college libraries around the world are forced to move strategies of offering access to information rather than building up library holdings, due to reasons of economic, technological viability in transforming them in to store house of knowledge base. Academic libraries should be considered as a research tools, co-evolving with technology. The Internet has changed the way in which universe of knowledge is communicated and hence also the role of libraries. Librarians are the ultimate search engines. Their level of technological expertise extends past the simple reference interview and selection of materials for the collections. Librarians interface with faculty to design and teach their students appropriate research skills; they manage and select digital collections and services; they serve on a variety of committees with the College; they conduct outreach and perform a vital role. Libraries are information portals and librarians are the guides who connect need with satisfaction. Librarians are the glue that binds successful, efficient and excellent library services to the students, faculty and staff that require library information resources. Traditional values associated with librarians include precision, discipline, attention to detail, and helpfulness. They may be seen as curators or custodians of books and other sources of information, but librarians are not usually regarded as publishers of information.

Paradigm Shift

Over the past few years, academic libraries have changed considerably as bibliographic utilities, online catalogs, automated circulation systems, and other new technologies have been implemented in a majority of library operations and services. These changes have created rising costs for libraries in a time of tight fiscal constraints, particularly in the area of telecommunications, buildings, furniture, and electronic equipment. The increased access to electronic information systems not held locally and to other new technologies such as CD-ROM, laser technologies, interactive multimedia packages, Optical character recognition and imaging systems, satellite communication and teleconferencing, laptop computers, packet telephone switches, and cellular telephones have also been making an impact in a few libraries along with LANs (local area networks) and WANs (wide area networks) for interconnecting local computing resources. The new technologies have required not only different expertise and training requirements for personnel but have required new types of personnel and more personnel, even though shifts in existing personnel could be made to meet new demands when the newer technologies made some activities obsolete and others less labor intensive.

Current Trends

Traditionally, a librarian is associated with collections

of books, as demonstrated by the etymology of the word "librarian" (from the Latin *liber*, "book"). The role of a librarian is continually evolving to meet social and technological needs. A modern librarian may deal with provision and maintenance of information in many formats, including: books; electronic resources; magazines; newspapers; audio and video recordings; maps; manuscripts; photographs and other graphic material; bibliographic databases; and web-based and digital resources. A librarian may also provide other information services, including: information literacy instruction; computer provision and training; coordination with community groups to host public programs; assistive technology for people with disabilities; and assistance locating community resources. Appreciation for librarians is often included by authors and scholars in the acknowledgment sections of books.

Before discussing on the opportunities and challenges of College librarians and information professionals in the new era, let's first look at the current trends discussed in most recent literature of library and information management. These current trends somehow or rather will have a bearing in shaping librarians and information professionals in the new era. They are summarized as follows:

- A vision towards information and knowledge rich society;
- Library functions in information and knowledge-based society;
- Knowledge-based economy – information & knowledge as drivers to boost the economy;
- Information management recognized as an important discipline;
- Information recognized as commodity (information brokerage, information entrepreneurship, fee-based information);
- Integrated and widespread ICT applications;
- Mushrooming of information systems – need for Information System Management;
- Role of digital/electronic/virtual library;
- Librarians are designated as cyber librarians;
- Competency- based assessment/training;
- Access role replace custodial role;
- Customer-focused/customer-centered, user oriented approach in provision of services;
- Strategic alliances, partnership and collaborations;
- Librarians need new management knowledge and skills;
- Specialized knowledge & skills in library and information management;
- Trend to develop digital contents to facilitate access.

Opportunities

Online libraries or information systems will be only a part of tomorrow's library. Access to recorded knowledge will not be completely online. Subject experts disagree with the increasingly popular belief that the computer's widespread use means online libraries will replace the library building along with its books, journals, and other printed material. The march of electronic technology in the library gives incentive to the idea that click and drag will replace brick, mortar, and paper. Computers have replaced the card catalog. People increasingly have the option of going online to search for books and

journals, to check out material, to find the due date for returns, and to order interlibrary loans. However, these options have not replaced human librarians or paperwork. Consider what has happened in society.

Challenges

Libraries are supplementing and replacing print resources with electronic resources at a fast pace and almost all of the electronic resources are now available on the web. One of the advantages of web environment as compared to print environment is that you can link from one document to another logically related document very easily. For example, it is very important for researchers to be able to link directly from a citation or abstract to the full-text of the article and from a reference at the end of a full-text article to the referenced full-text article without any navigation. As more information resources become available electronically on the web, linking becomes even more important to researchers. Retrieval methodology on the web has developed within this open and unstructured environment, where tools have purposely developed to provide simple and easy to understand interfaces based on word searching and simple directories. This is an environment where retrieval services can produce results irrespective of the skills of the client, where the medium itself, hypertext linking, can provide the retrieval method and deliver the actual results, and where the provision of intuitive options and visual cues are critical to the effectiveness of retrieval tools. The need to accommodate user behaviour is made more challenging because users do not necessarily exhibit a single approach when adopting retrieval strategies on the web. Instead it must be assumed that users may act differently when searching for different types of content, or when assuming contextual persona. Their behaviours will reflect different states of knowledge in a given subject area, different assumptions about content, and the different social and emotional contexts that generate specific user needs. The solution to this issue is to provide a variety of discovery tools and to design the web site so as to present them all as equally accessible alternatives. The libraries all over the world are now responding with adaptability, creativity and flexibility. Indian librarians of today serve in a society which is actually in flux, torn by the technological revolution and rapid political changes. Librarians and information professionals in India are now experiencing both excitement and anxiety as a result of the sweeping societal changes. The major challenges faced by present college librarians are:

Complexity in locating and analyzing and linking of Information;

- Overloading and redundancy of information;
- Lack of Standardization of hardware and software;
- Financial investment for setting and maintaining the technology
- Interpretability of Intermediary and end users;
- The existing technology may be insufficient to accommodate the tremendous growth of information on Internet.

Conclusion

Library and information professionals should add new ICT skills to their current capabilities in order to help users overcoming their anxieties about the new world of networked and digitized information, and assist them to navigate through it. For which training is indispensable to bestow the professionals with the skills, knowledge and confidence to use ICT effectively in their day-to day work, and to the benefit of their clientele. Above all, making library staff competent locally and globally necessitates greater 'investment in staff' for raising their level of technology skills and preventing skills obsolescence. The libraries all over the world are now responding with adaptability, creativity and flexibility. Indian librarians of today serve in a society which is actually in flux, torn by the technological revolution and rapid political changes. Librarians and information professionals in India are now experiencing both excitement and anxiety as a result of the sweeping societal changes. In preparing the future librarians of India, in making them more proactive, the library and information science departments of different universities can definitely play a significant role.

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